

SOFTWARE

STEINBERG Cubase 4

★★★★

£580 inc VAT

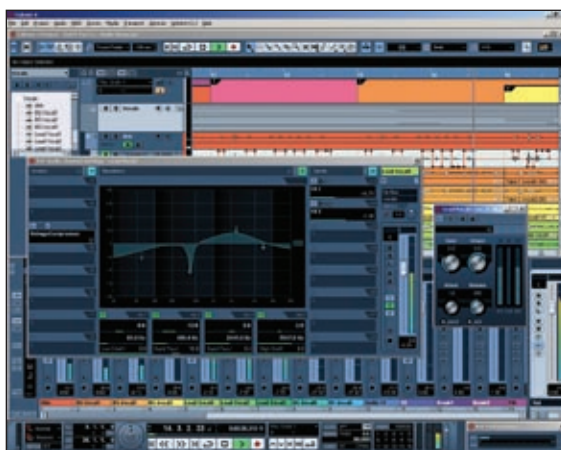
This is the ninth version of Cubase since the program first appeared for the Atari ST in 1989. Steinberg reset the version number in 2002 with the launch of Cubase SX, but this latest version is simply called Cubase 4. The software is far from simple, though; 18 years of development has resulted in a mass of comprehensive features covering everything from MIDI sequencing and synthesis to multi-track audio recording, editing and mixing. This latest version includes a radical overhaul to the plug-in library, a new asset management system and improvements to the mixer and scoring facilities.

Cubase SX3's instruments were basic, but the new instrument plug-ins bring it back in line with the competition. HALion One is a general-purpose synthesizer that draws on samples taken from Yamaha's Motif keyboards. There's little editing potential, but the 656 presets are up to professional standards and cover a wide range of acoustic emulations and more abstract tones. Prologue is a virtual analogue synth that doesn't have a remarkable raw tone, but a wide range of oscillator types and modulation options provide ample scope for creating interesting noises. The remaining two instruments, Spector and Mystic, take abstract experimentation to new heights. Spector uses a matrix of resonant comb filters, and Mystic employs physical modelling and spectrum filters to produce a range of other-worldly noises that are unobtainable through conventional synthesis techniques.

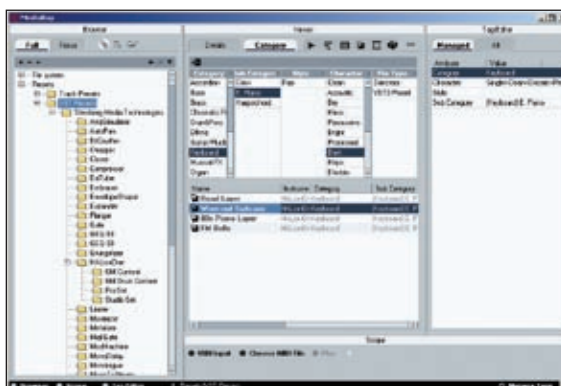
The effects plug-ins include 30 new additions, including high-quality examples of the usual bread-and-butter effects and a few more unusual ones, such as a basic guitar amp simulator and a multi-band compressor. Sadly, though, there's no new reverb plug-in, and the one carried over from SX3 is uninspiring. All the new arrivals adhere to the latest VST3 standard, which brings various advantages including automatic switching to mono, stereo or surround-sound operation. However, there's bad news for users with existing third-party plug-ins: only VST 2.4 plug-ins are guaranteed to work, while DirectX support has been abandoned altogether. This could have disastrous repercussions for upgraders, who may need to continue using Cubase SX3 for existing projects.

Asset management has seen a thorough overhaul. The new Media Bay window organises audio, video and MIDI files, plus instrument, effect and track presets, using metadata tags to sort them by instrument type, musical genre and tonal character. It's an ambitious concept but it needs third-party plug-in developers to come on board if it's to realise its potential. It's particularly useful in the new Instrument Tracks, which simplifies setting up instrument plug-ins and allows the user to browse presets by sonic character, regardless of the source instrument.

A new Control Room feature makes it much easier to use Cubase without resorting to a hardware mixer, particularly in



▲ Cubase 4's brand new plug-in suite brings both advantages and disadvantages



▲ The Media Bay search facility allows users to browse instrument presets by tonal character, regardless of the source instrument

recording sessions that require multiple headphone mixes for performers. However, other mix limitations remain unresolved. Mixer channels are limited to eight inserts and eight auxiliary effects, and certain signal routing options are unavailable. You can't use one channel to trigger a compressor or gate inserted on another channel, for example (a technique known as side-chaining) – an inexcusable omission at this price. At least it's now possible to rearrange the order of plug-ins using drag-and-drop, removing a serious frustration with previous versions.

There's no doubt that Cubase 4 is a highly capable application, but it doesn't justify costing £250 more than its strongest competitors, Ableton Live (*What's New, Shopper* February 2007) and Cakewalk Sonar (*What's New, Shopper* March 2007). For those who don't have near-on £600, the mid-price Cubase Studio 4 takes over from Cubase SL3. It's more expensive than its predecessor (up from £200 to £279) and differs in the features it omits compared with the full version. Rather than further reducing the insert and instrument slots, it loses various new features such as Control Room and some of the plug-ins, plus some advanced ones few will miss, such as surround sound.

Unlike SL3, Cubase Studio 4 includes score editing and MIDI editing directly on the timeline. It's a shame

to lose the Spector and Mystic instruments, but with HALion One and Prologue still included, Cubase Studio 4 adds up to a better-value package than the full-price Cubase 4. Still, £280 isn't much cheaper than the full versions of Ableton Live and Sonar, both of which have more to offer.

Ben Pitt

FAQ

Q Why is WEP encryption less secure than WPA?

A Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) is often described in terms of its 'bit' encryption level, such as 64-bit. However, this isn't strictly accurate, as WEP uses a 24-bit initialisation vector (IV) followed by the key. So 64-bit WEP is really 40-bit encryption plus the 24-bit IV.

The IV is sent unencrypted with every bit of data sent. If a hacker listens for long enough, this unencrypted IV gives them enough information to guess the entire WEP key and gain access to your network.

WiFi Protected Access (WPA) uses a shared pass phrase. It still uses an IV, but the encryption key is changed dynamically after a specified length of time, so a hacker can't listen for long enough to break the key. If all your devices support it, you should use WPA.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor



david@computershopper.co.uk

SUMMARY

- ✓ Enhanced plug-in library
- ✗ Not a seamless upgrade for current users
- ✗ Expensive

MUSIC COMPOSITION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP or Mac OS X 10.4, 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, USB port
PRODUCT CODE 706532
SUPPLIER www.turnkey.co.uk
DETAILS www.steinberg.net

McAfee Wireless Protection 2007



£19 inc VAT

Wireless networks can be a pain to configure, especially when it comes to security. McAfee's Wireless Protection aims to make it simple to protect your wireless network and gives you control over the people who connect to it. The software comes with three user licences, so you can protect up to three PCs. You also get McAfee's Site Advisor, which tells you whether or not the website you're visiting is safe.

Once installed, Wireless Protection 2007 takes over from the Windows Wireless Zero Configuration Wizard as the wireless manager of choice. It can act in a similar way, letting you join wireless networks. We were a little concerned to see that an application that handles security should show in plain text any WEP or WPA keys you type in.

Wireless Protection 2007's real job, though, is to protect your wireless network. It's supposed to do this by connecting to your wireless router and configuring the security settings automatically. It's a good idea in theory, but the sheer number of wireless routers on the market makes this impractical. In fact, we couldn't get it to work at all on several new routers.

It half-worked on a Linksys router, by which we mean that it connected, changed the security settings to use an unknown WEP key and then displayed an error message saying configuration had failed. We clicked the button for further help, but this only displayed the contents page of the online help. Locked out of our wireless network, we had to connect to our router using a wired Ethernet connection and reset the settings.

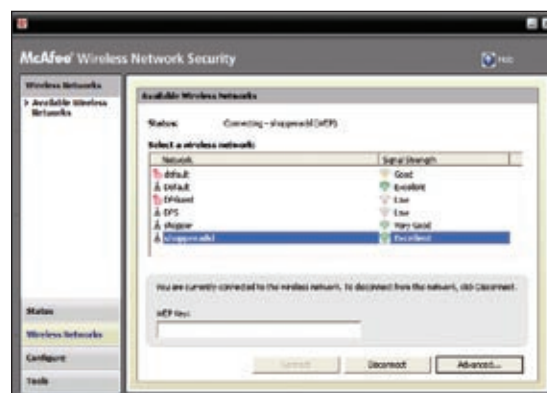
Eventually we managed to find a router that worked with it. This time the automatic configuration was successful, although Wireless Protection activated only WEP, so we had to configure it manually to use WPA.

With a secure network in place, Wireless Protection 2007 works well. Other PCs running the software can see the secure network and request to join it. This causes a pop-up to appear on the Administrator's PC asking if they want to allow the new computer to connect. It's simple and gives you a degree of control over who's connected. New PCs are sent the new security key when it's updated.

SUMMARY

- ☒ Clever way of adding clients to network
- ☒ Didn't configure all our wireless routers
- ☒ Works only with PCs

WIRELESS PROTECTION Requires Windows 2000 or above, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 115MB disk space, wireless network adaptor
 PRODUCT CODE MWL07UDV3RAA
 SUPPLIER www.tesco.com
 DETAILS www.mcafee.com



▲ Wireless Protection takes over as your PC's wireless manager

Wireless Protection 2007 is available only for PCs, but you can find out the current encryption key manually and enter it on a Mac or other network device. These devices will not receive key updates from Wireless Protection 2007, so if you don't want them to lose their network connection you have to disable key rotation. This leaves your network no more secure than it was before you had Wireless Protection 2007.

Now that WPA-PSK is available on most routers and wireless clients, there's less need for applications such as this. WPA-PSK automatically rotates keys, so it's more secure than WEP (see the FAQ) provided you pick a secure password. With more wireless devices on the market, McAfee's PC-centric approach isn't a good way to manage your network. It's also not guaranteed to work with every wireless router, so you're better off configuring your wireless settings manually and using WPA-PSK.

David Ludlow

Also consider...

MICROSOFT Works Suite 2006



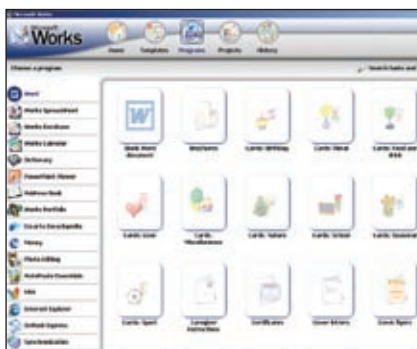
£43 inc VAT

Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and is very business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.

OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
 PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.microsoft.com/worksuite Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta ☒ Old version of Word FULL REVIEW Mar 2006



SONY Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

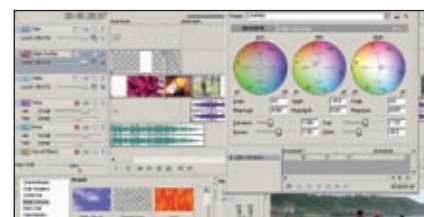


£59 inc VAT

Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
 PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com
☒ Lots of powerful new features ☒ DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



SONY DVD Architect Studio

★★★★★

£32 inc VAT



DVD Architect Studio is a powerful DVD-authoring program that was previously available only as part of Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD (see 'Also consider...' on page 47). For those who already have a preferred video-editing application, DVD Architect Studio is now available separately, shaving around £20 off the price of the bundle. The software under review is an update to version 3 (which comes bundled with Vegas Movie Studio +DVD 6).

The only new feature in this latest release is Dolby Digital audio encoding. This doesn't improve quality over the standard uncompressed PCM audio format, but its lower bit rate frees up capacity for more video. You can also add six-channel surround Dolby Digital audio, although you'll have to encode it elsewhere.

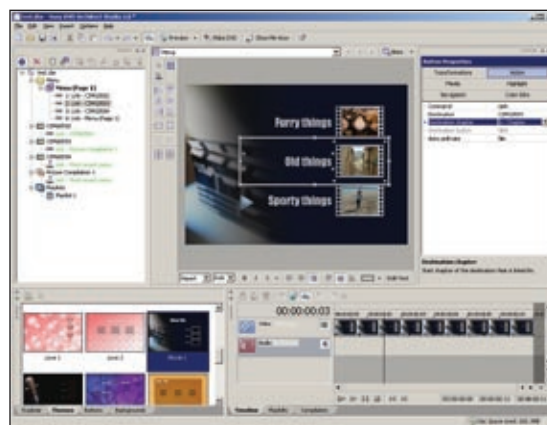
Despite the scant improvements, DVD Architect remains without peers below £100. Casual users will find it straightforward and elegant, with everything arranged neatly into a single tabbed screen. When applying one of the menu templates, buttons and text are intelligently

resized to fit the menu. It's easy to generate scene selection menus, and menu pages are linked together automatically.

The highlight is the tremendous scope for designing menus, buttons and disc navigation structures from scratch. You can make menu pages from any combination of graphics, although you'll have to create animations elsewhere and import them. Navigation options are comprehensive, and only the lack of multiple soundtrack, subtitle and encryption options separates it from authoring software that costs hundreds of pounds.

Audio compilations and slideshows are handled elegantly, with options to add images to audio compilations and music to slideshows.

As such, there's not much difference between the two. However, for some reason slideshows are rendered as video files, which wastes disc capacity since the DVD Video format supports still images with musical accompaniment – as the audio compilation feature demonstrates.



▲ Under DVD Architect Studio's straightforward interface are some seriously powerful authoring tools

Frustratingly, the software starts all projects in NTSC format until you change the default setting in the Properties dialog box, which could confuse new users. Otherwise, the rendering facilities are excellent, with high-quality conversion of non-compliant resolutions and frame rates, and an excellent smart render feature that reuses rendered files, avoiding the need to re-encode entire discs after making one or two changes.

With no capture facility, this isn't the right package for those who want a single application for archiving video cassettes to DVD. However, anyone working on home, business or creative video projects will find DVD Architect Studio unbeatable. Unless you need support for multiple soundtracks, subtitles or copy protection, it's the best DVD-authoring software at any price.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ **Vast scope for advanced disc design**
- ✓ **Mostly easy and quick to use**
- ✗ **Features could be better signposted**

DVD-AUTHORING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 SP4 or XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE SDVDAS4000
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com

Also consider...

CLOUDMARK Desktop for Outlook

★★★★★

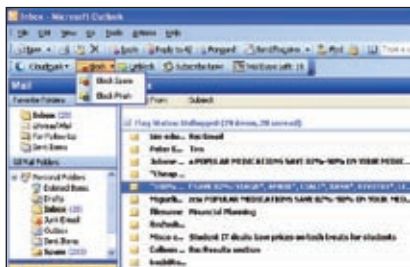
£24 inc VAT



Cloudmark Desktop is available for Outlook and Outlook Express. The software connects to a large database of spam messages maintained by other users, so it has a high probability of detecting spam. Any spam classifications you make are fed back into the database, improving Cloudmark's detection rates.

It was the clear winner of our Anti-Spam Labs test in *Shopper* December 2006.

ANTI-SPAM SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Outlook or Outlook Express **SUPPLIER** Cloudmark 020 7100 5224 **DETAILS** www.cloudmark.com ✓ Excellent anti-spam detection ✗ Outlook/Outlook Express users only **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2006



MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT



Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL is a great way to convert your vinyl LPs to CD, cleaning up the sound in the process to give excellent results. This version includes all the necessary hardware you need to record directly from records to your PC. It's also a great tool for music and video production, and the audio CD-authoring tools are particularly good.

AUDIO-RESTORATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000IWZXMK **SUPPLIER** www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.magix.co.uk ✓ Complete package for converting vinyl ✗ Interface a bit rough around the edges **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



CAKEWALK Sonar 6 Producer Edition

★★★★★

£329 inc VAT



Sonar 6 is the best music-production software you can buy. Its professional-quality effects and instruments go way beyond those of the competition. Other packages will appeal to certain niche groups, but if you want the best of everything Sonar still pretty much rules the roost.

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 1.3GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space
SUPPLIER www.dolphinmusic.co.uk **DETAILS** www.cakewalk.com ✓ Comprehensive audio suite ✗ AudioSnap doesn't live up to expectations **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007



ACRONIS True Image 10 Home

★★★★★

£24 inc VAT



As its name suggests, Acronis's True Image was originally a disk-imaging program. Rather than backing up specific files or folders, it creates an exact copy of all the information on your hard disk. If Windows should become corrupted and no longer able to boot, you can restore your system by overwriting your hard disk with the image file.

Version 10 of True Image is still able to copy an entire hard disk or partition, but it does a lot more besides. As you'd expect, it offers incremental and differential backups, allowing you to save disk space and perform speedier backups. It is also able to mount disk images so that they appear as drives in My Computer. This makes finding and restoring individual files and folders quick and easy. The program can clone a hard disk, too, copying the entire contents and file structure of one disk straight to another. Backup images can be made on the fly or automatically according to a user-defined schedule.

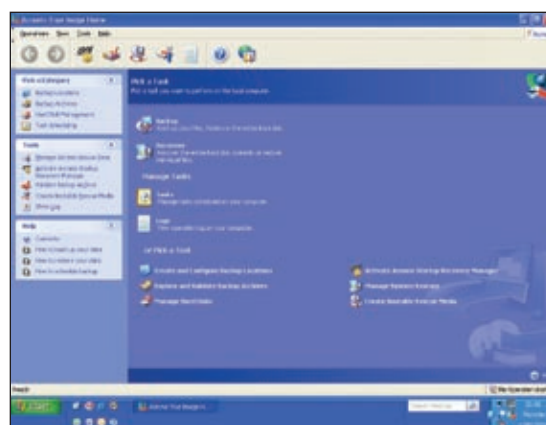
Useful as these features are, though, they are all fairly standard in modern disk-imaging programs. What

distinguishes True Image from competitors such as Symantec's Norton Ghost are those features that more properly belong to a sophisticated backup program. As well as making images of an entire disk or partition, True Image can make backups of particular files or folders. It can also back up your emails, and it can search for and back up specific types of file, such as music or image files, for instance.

The program can even back up the settings of particular applications. Should the application in question become unstable and need to be reinstalled, you can use the settings saved in True Image to restore its settings quickly to the way you want them.

In practice, some of these features suffer from limitations that will frustrate some users.

The only email clients True Image can back up are Outlook and Outlook Express. It didn't work at all with the popular Thunderbird email program, and it can back up the settings of only a limited number of applications. These drawbacks aside, Acronis provides the user



▲ True Image 10's main screen provides instant access to all its important tools and settings

with a far greater degree of specificity and control than its major competitors.

True Image 10 is easy to use. Every important setting is available from the program's main screen. At first, this didn't seem like a good idea; it makes the main screen look cluttered. But once you've worked with the program for a short while, you'll learn where to find the options or settings you need. Norton Ghost, by contrast, hides some important functions behind several menus and sub-programs; we almost overlooked them entirely.

Despite a few shortcomings, Acronis True Image 10 is versatile, precise, easy to use and does everything you need in order to protect your valuable data. It's the best disk-imaging and backup program we've seen, and a well-deserved Best Buy.

Peter Wood

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Lots of good features
- ✗ Some features are not that useful

PARTITIONING SOFTWARE Windows 2000 (SP4) and above, 133MHz processor, 128MB, 150MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE AT110
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.acronis.com

SYMANTEC Norton Ghost 10

★★★★★

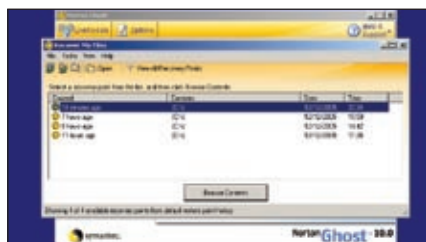
£35 inc VAT



It stands to reason that, at some point, your PC will go wrong and you'll need to turn to backups to get it working again. Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 aims to make this task as easy as possible.

It automatically makes a complete image of your PC, operating system and all. When you restore an image, you will get all your data and all your settings back the way you want them. This is an essential program for PC owners.

DISK-IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 160MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 10439689-IN **SUPPLIER** www.gameseek.com **DETAILS** www.symantec.co.uk ✓ Powerful and easy to use ✗ Restore CD changed our system clock **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2006



AVANQUEST RadioTracker 2

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



RadioTracker 2 makes finding new music easy by downloading tracks automatically from internet radio stations. Simply select the genre of music you like and the software does the rest. A new feature enables you to pick specific tracks you want – the simple way to find a rarely heard classic.

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 128MB RAM, 500MHz processor, 100MB disk space
SUPPLIER <http://shop.avanquest.com> **DETAILS** www.avanquest.com ✓ Downloads the music you want ✗ Can't delete unwanted tracks easily **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2007



MOZILLA Firefox 2.0

★★★★★

Free



The best browser on the market has just got even better with Firefox 2.0. New features include short cuts to search popular websites and a phishing filter. Tabs are easier to manage, and if your browser crashes, it reloads them all the next time you start the application.

Firefox is fast and easy to use, and remains our favourite browser.

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or above, 233MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 50MB disk space **DETAILS** www.mozilla.com ✓ Reloads tabs after a crash ✗ Fast Find doesn't have a next button **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2007



TENOMICHI

3D Media Centre Gold

★★★★

£40 inc VAT

Unless you've got Windows Vista, your graphics card is idle the whole time you're using the standard Windows desktop. Tenomichi aims to change that with its 3D Media Centre, which uses your graphics card to drive a 3D interface that provides easy access to all the media files on your PC.

Games have had 3D front ends for years and as a result are easier to navigate and understand than the flat Windows desktop. Pitfalls abound, however, and Tenomichi has fallen into most of them while trying to create a working interface. For a start, a 3D interface should make the application more accessible to all users, but 3D Media Centre's infuriating sound effects and tech-styled graphics could alienate everyone but computer enthusiasts.

Controlled by mouse, keyboard or a remote control (not provided), the Gold version comes with six applications on its 3D carousel. 3D DVD uses Nvidia's PureVideo codec to enlist the help of your Nvidia graphics card (but not ATI cards) to provide hardware acceleration for DVD playback and video editing. The exact level of acceleration and support you receive depends on your graphics card – see

Nvidia's website (www.nvidia.com) for full details. The Audio CD player is little more than functional, with MP3 or other audio file support conspicuously absent. This is a criminal oversight for a modern media centre.

3D Media Centre provides a tool for converting and transferring video to your portable media player, PSP, iPod Video or even mobile phone. It's quite straightforward to use and does a reasonable job of conversion but, like the other applications in the suite, it looks terrible compared with similar Windows-based tools and is awkward to use. Although there is a TV icon on the carousel, TV playback is not yet supported. It should be available soon through a free upgrade and will include DVB and HD digital TV and multiple-screen preview. There is also a functioning slideshow creator that uses your graphics card to provide a clutch of funky 3D photo transitions.

3D Media Centre's saving grace is the inclusion of 3D Edit 4. This is Tenomichi's flagship



▲ 3D Media Centre's front end enables the user to choose from a selection of inadequate and non-existent applications

product and, despite suffering from the same 3D interface issues as the other applications in the suite, is considerably more polished. The benefits of using the graphics card for image processing are clearly illustrated here. With real-time effects from a Shaderman graphics engine and 3D transitions, even the interface doesn't manage to obscure the power on offer. Combining DirectX and DirectDraw in a single video-editing application is a great idea and enhances your creative ability with instant results.

As a media centre application, 3D Media Centre is well below par. The interface is clumsy and lacks polish, while the applications don't fulfil the basic requirements of a media centre. Were it not for the inclusion of 3D Edit, it wouldn't be worth buying. As it is, if you have a powerful graphics card and want to add complex effects to your home videos, 3D Edit makes 3D Media Centre more attractive and better value.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ 3D Edit 4 video-editing software
- ✗ No MP3 playback
- ✗ Interface hard to use

MEDIA CENTRE SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 or above, DirectX 9.0c graphics card, supports DVD, MPEG2, WMV9 and WMV HD, H.264, MPEG4, HDV, DivX, Xvid
PRODUCT CODE B000KGKCGG
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.tenomichi.com

Also consider...

MICROSOFT

Encarta Reference Library 2007

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT



Encarta is the best encyclopedia you can get for your PC. It's easy to search and illustrates a lot of its entries with multimedia items that really help kids learn. Its articles are quite short, but external links take you to more in-depth content. It provides a stunning balance of facts and fun.

ENCYCLOPEDIA Requires 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 83012047

SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com **DETAILS** www.microsoft.com

✓ Friendly interface and excellent multimedia ✗ Lacks depth in some articles **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



ROXIO

Easy Media Creator 9 Suite

★★★★★

£44 inc VAT



This suite comes with all the media-editing tools you'll ever need. Its greatest strengths are its tight integration between all the modules and its friendly, task-oriented interface. With capable editing tools, it's great value and the best media suite you can buy, although there's not enough difference to warrant upgrading from version 8.

MEDIA SUITE Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 1GB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 227000UK

SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com **DETAILS** www.dabs.com
 ✓ Excellent media-editing tools ✗ Little reason to upgrade from Creator 8 **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



DISKEEPER

Diskeeper 2007 Home

★★★★★

£24 inc VAT

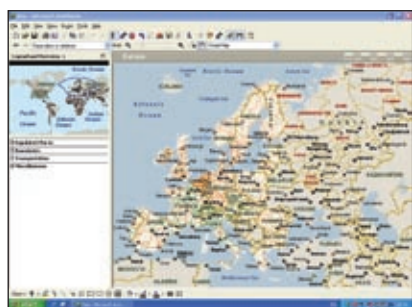


Over time your hard disk can get untidy, with fragments of files spreading across the entire disk. Diskeeper 2007 puts them all back together again, improving disk performance. It does all this behind the scenes, so once you've configured it, you'll never have to go near it again.

It's not the most exciting application, but it's essential for a smooth-running PC.

DEFRAGMENTATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP. Maximum drive size 768GB **SUPPLIER** www.diskeeper.com **DETAILS** www.diskeeper.com ✓ Efficient defragmentation ✗ Not worth upgrading from previous version **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007





▲ AutoRoute has maps for Western and Eastern Europe, but the interface looks 10 years old

MICROSOFT AutoRoute 2007

★★

£44 inc VAT (software only); £98 inc VAT (with GPS receiver)

The latest version of Microsoft's route-planning software includes integrated support for the Windows Live Search and Windows Live Local services. You can buy the package on its own or bundled with a USB GPS receiver.

AutoRoute's interface looks old and is reminiscent of a Windows 95 application. To find a destination you can type an address into the search bar or find it manually by scrolling around the map screen. The maps themselves have plenty of detail for Western Europe, but for any locations east of Germany only major towns have any detail.

One new feature in AutoRoute 2007 is the Windows Live Local icon. Clicking this opens a webpage, which displays AutoRoute's currently displayed location in Microsoft's free online Live Search mapping application. This provides more detail than AutoRoute and has the bonus of detailed satellite imagery. Instant access to the superior Live Search maps makes you wonder why you'd bother spending £44 on AutoRoute in the first place.

One of AutoRoute's main strengths is its route-planning function. You can enter a number of waypoints across Europe and the software calculates complicated routes quickly. It displays your trip as step-by-step instructions and shows the route on a map. The instructions are clear and give the names of roads as well as their number. The software also supports GPS receivers and can be used in your car, but there is no 3D view, and driving with a notebook on your lap is ridiculous. Windows Mobile devices are supported, too, but the software is nowhere near as good as a dedicated sat-nav.

Microsoft's AutoRoute 2007 is a reasonable mapping and route-planning application, but it's poor for in-car navigation and does nothing you can't do for free online.

Chris Fিন্নamore

SUMMARY

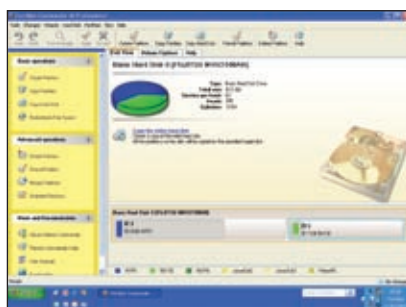
- ✓ Clear route planning
- ✗ Not as good as online services
- ✗ Useless for in-car navigation

ROUTE-PLANNING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 SE or above, Pentium II-class processor, 64MB RAM, 500MB disk space

PRODUCT CODE 689-00901

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS www.microsoft.com



▲ Take full command of your hard disk, and rescue your PC if it drifts into troubled waters

VCOM Partition Commander 10 Professional

★★★★

£30 inc VAT

If you don't manage your PC's hard disks and partitions properly, you could slow down your PC and even put your data at risk. Windows XP's built-in Disk Management can perform simple tasks such as creating new partitions, but that's about all. For anything really sophisticated you need a third-party application such as Partition Commander.

Partition Commander is well designed and does everything you'd expect. From the main screen you can create, delete, resize, merge, format and copy hard disk partitions. You can also undelete a partition and even copy an entire hard disk. All these operations are easy to carry out, but if you get confused you'll almost certainly find help in the clear and comprehensive manual.

The install disc also doubles as a boot disc, allowing you to partition a drive without accessing your PC's operating system, which is useful if Windows has crashed. It also offers an extensive range of options, including a utility that can fix damaged Master Boot Records. Both the Windows and bootable versions of Partition Commander support FAT 16/32, NTFS and Linux ext2 and ext3 partitions.

Most of Partition Commander's functions can be had for free by downloading the bootable System Rescue CD from <http://qtparted.sourceforge.net/download.en.html>. You don't have to be a technical guru to use this – just able to follow instructions. If you don't feel adventurous, though, VCom Partition Commander is an excellent alternative. It's cheaper than its main commercial rival, Norton Partition Magic, and works just as well, although it lacks the boot manager, which lets you install multiple operating systems on a PC.

Peter Wood

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Bootable CD
- ✗ No boot manager

PARTITIONING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 95 or above, 300MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 40MB disk space

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Owning your own website can seem like a lot of work, what with having to register a domain, find a host, design your site and upload all your changes by FTP. Mr Site's Takeaway Website aims to take the pain out of creating and running your own website by providing everything you need, including your own domain name and web hosting.

You can either register a brand new domain name or use one you already own. Either way, the next step, and the least impressive one in Mr Site's repertoire, is to select a base style for your site from a particularly uninspiring set. You then build the site by adding pages and content through a clear, concise menu interface. Text can be entered directly and edited or copied from existing documents, while pictures can be uploaded directly to the page. In Simple mode the editor is little more than a basic text input box, but it becomes more powerful when you switch to Creative mode. This lets you add complex formatting and tables to better structure your pages and, once you are more confident, enter HTML code directly.

Mr Site might be easy to use, but it's not basic. There are templates for adding a blog, forum, guest book or feedback form, all of which are easily administered and amended, as well as galleries, an online jukebox and widgets such as clocks and counters. You can use the site as an online store, with a basic shopping basket template that makes updating easy and links directly to your PayPal account.

Mr Site is available as a boxed product or a download, although the latter is little more than a plain-speaking manual and a password. Considering you get hosting and a domain name for just £30, Takeaway Website is an inexpensive and straightforward way to create and maintain a respectable website, and is highly recommended.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ Powerful site creation tools
- ✗ Style options are limited

WEBSITE CREATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Internet Explorer 6

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